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THE RISE AND FALL OF AUTHORITY.

ONE of the clearest expositions ever made of Reason and Authority in relation to problems of being and thought is that which comes down to us from the vestibule of the mediæval scholasticism, from the very heart of the Dark Ages, the middle of the ninth century, in the time of Charles the Bald and of Pope Nicholas I. It was then that John Scotus Erigena in his "*De Divisione Naturæ*" taught that while the authority of Holy Scripture, as the revelation of eternal truth, must be held immovable, the exegesis of Scripture depends on the conjoint forces of both reason and authority, and that in the composition of these forces we must have regard to the priority of the one in dignity and of the other in time. In point of dignity, reason, he says, stands before authority, but in point of time authority comes before reason. The superior dignity of reason is argued by him from the fact that authority itself proceeds from reason, not reason from authority. But as authority, working in time, gathers up in its bosom the reason of those who lived before us, what is prior in time becomes the guide of that education by which we are brought to the adult use of reason, in the rightful exercise of which we review the grounds of authority. In the last analysis, therefore, for those who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil, the binding force of all human opinions must be found in reason, not in authority. True authority, says Erigena, is commensurate with right reason, and right reason with true authority. Authority is, indeed, the vital air in which we live and move and have our intellectual being, but it is in the critical function of the reflective reason that we must find the organon by which knowledge grows in volume and lucidity—the great heart by which, with its successive systole and diastole, the blood in our brain is kept from degen-

erating into a thin and watery ichor. Authority is in order to reason that reason may itself become authoritative; reason is in order to authority that authority may itself become rational.

It is the purpose of this paper to exhibit the perpetually alternating constriction and dilatation which have kept the life blood of the intellectual world in healthful circulation. That is, authority will here be considered not as the objective rule of life and conduct, but as the subjective norm and modulus of opinion in the school, in the state, and in the church. And if in this historical discussion it shall appear that authority has often held the flux of opinions within the channels cut by tradition, it will also appear that the stream of tradition has itself been caught from age to age within the "compulsive course" of the restless human reason.

The great founders of philosophies and theologies, like the founders of civil polities, have enjoyed in every age of the world a natural right of leadership, as seen in the fact of their leading; but those who come after them, receiving the tradition by inheritance rather than natural right, may assume to wield by authority the scepter which was won by reason. It is thus that authority *de facto* comes to be translated into authority *de jure*. Authority resting on living facts and living functions has no need to assert itself. Its sufficient *raison d'être* is seen in its being. But the authority which rests on obsolescent facts, or on functions beginning to slough off in the structural changes of human thought, is precisely in the stage when it will be more than ever tempted to exalt the horn of its prerogative.

All the great philosophies and theologies of human invention have passed through three stages — the stages of formation, of organization, and of disintegration. It is in the second and the third of these stages that authority will deepen the purple of its latidave and broaden the stripe of its phylactery. On the first emergence of a new doctrine, it works according to the spirit and power which are native to it, but after it has come to dominate over the minds of men it adds the prestige of magistrality to the prestige of its ideas. The very power which is native to it, if that power be considerable, tends to create a natural vortex for it in the atmosphere of public opinion, until at length, like Fame in the epic of Virgil, it acquires force by going. And the degree of force acquired by opinions through increase in the velocity of their transmission and increase in the mass of their adherents,

will measure at any given period the momentum of their authority. So long as a doctrine spreads by simple virtue of the expansive energy inherent in it, or so long as the vortex which it creates in the public mind is genuine and not factitious, the doctrine is in the formative stage of its working on society. But if the doctrine is committed to the tradition of a sect, party, or school, we may soon expect to witness the intrusion of other than the purely original sources of its strength. It will proceed to add the weight of unreasoning authority to the weight of its proofs, as the Pythagoreans did with the "He said so" of their master, and as Cicero did with his "By Hercules! I would rather be wrong with Plato." In the first of these stages the elements of opinion are free, fluid, elastic, and spontaneous in their reactions; in the second stage the elements are growing constrained, rigid, immobile, mechanical. In the first stage the doctrine is positive and aggressive; in the second stage it is negative and defensive. In the first stage it is full of life and has no use for health-lifts; in the second stage it is growing valetudinarian, plugs its windows, and shrinks from the blasts of the misty mountain wind.

Next comes the third stage, the period of decomposition and recomposition, when the old forms, subscriptions, and articles of a creed in philosophy or religion are found inadequate to hold the new thought which is seething in the minds of men. Judaism was found in this stage when the Teacher of Galilee came in the fullness of time to substitute spiritual Christianity for Pharisaic formalism and Sadducean skepticism. Feudalism was found in this stage when a new social life in Europe began to crystallize around the free communities of Italy and the free towns of Germany. The Mosaic law was discharged of its divine authority because of its weakness and unprofitableness after it had fulfilled its mission. Feudalism was discharged of its human authority after it had spent its strength as a constructive and conservative force. Things divine and things human are embraced within this dispensation of the fullness of times.

It is, however, the lesson and moral of universal history that when authority has once concentered itself in the form of a doctrine, a theology, or a ritual, it tends to outlive the period of its usefulness. It is thus that the Scribes and Pharisees continued to sit in the seat of Moses long after they had made his law of no effect by the vain traditions of the Jerusalem and Babylonian

Talmuds, and they were never so blatant as in the day when a new order of beatitudes, a new conception of morality, and a new theory of life were proclaimed in the Sermon on the Mount. The cosmological theories of the Platonic philosophy had survived their period of usefulness when the Platonizing Christians of Alexandria were vainly laboring to bring the *Timæus* into harmony with the Book of Genesis. The entire philosophy which passes under the name of Neo-Platonism is the child of authority striving to construe itself in the presence of rival systems — of Jewish philosophy running down to its dregs in the theosophism of Philo, and of Christian philosophy in the first crude fermentation of the new wine which had come to gladden the hearts of men. The polytheistic mythology of Rome had become nothing better than a painted corpse when its professional mourners, in the days of St. Augustine, were complaining that the old literature, the old art, and the old polity, as well as the old religion of the Roman Empire, had been destroyed by the new Christian cult which Tacitus in his day had denounced as an *exitiabilis superstitio*. It is because the authority of the Roman civil imperialism survived the period of its usefulness, that it fell a lingering prey to the wiser and better imperialism of the Roman Catholic hierarchy, when that hierarchy came to build the Papacy on the ruins of the throne of the Cæsars. It is because the authority of the mediæval hierarchy outlived the period of its usefulness in affairs of state, that laymen wrestled long with papal legates and Cardinals before they won control over the politics of the civilized world. It is because the old scholasticism with its strife of words had finally sharpened the minds of men into a perception of its own unprofitableness, that that system of verbal philosophy, which did good service in its day by clarifying the doctrine of concepts and purifying the language of science, was forever relegated to the dust-bin of history at the Revival of Learning. We can always see in the mere attitude of the philosophical teacher whether he is drawing new truth from the perennial springs of the human reason, or whether, with force-pump and piston, he is lifting still waters from one or another of the great reservoirs into which the human spirit has poured its choicest thought and speculation. When an old philosophy or institution is so far put on the defensive that it begins to justify itself in the terms of a new philosophy or of a new social movement, that is a pretty sure

sign that the old order is changing to give place to the new. It is plain that the authority of Platonism is beginning to suffer eclipse when its putative disciples, in the third century after Christ, are more solicitous for the invention of philosophical harmonies than for the discovery of the new Christian truth. It is a sign of changing lunations in the phases of faith when, with or without our telescopes, we can see the new moon "wi' the old moon in her arms."

In all the lunations which mark the revolutions of authority there has never been one so full of portents as that which dates from the Revival of Learning. The Renaissance, with the discoveries which followed in its wake — the discovery of printing, the discovery of the New World, the discovery of the Copernican theory of the solar system — has been aptly called by Michelet "The Discovery of Man." The children of the New Birth begat a new species of authority — the authority of Humanism — and installed that authority in the fore-front of their age. The quest for parchments and palimpsests became more eager than ever had been the quest for the bones of saints. Students took their seats at midnight on the Esquiline Hill to make sure of the early morning lecture on Virgil. Scholars changed their names in learning as monks and nuns changed their names in religion. Sanseverino becomes Julius Pomponius Lætus in Latin, and Schwarzerd becomes Melanchthon in Greek. "Grey-headed men went to school to study Cicero and Homer. Athenian and Roman costumes fluttered through the streets and salons of Paris. A Macedonian phalanx was enrolled out of the French army, and, at the approach of death, learned men imitated the dying declamations of Cato and Antoninus." This was the stage of classical enthusiasm. Next came its stages of degeneration, as seen at first in "Ciceronianism," then in the classical dilettantism and affectation which have left their echo in the Gongarism of Spain, the *préciosité* of France, the Marinism of Italy and the Euphuism of England. The new social power had developed a new hypocrisy in homage to its authority — the hypocrisy of learning.

How the church had at first favored the new learning, is written in the mere chronology of the great universities of Europe, nearly all of which were planted before the era of the Protestant Reformation. How the new learning became a constant source of doctrinal trouble and theological schism,

is written in the history of the ecclesiastical councils, called again and again to settle by the voice of authority such disputes as those which vexed churchmen and scholastics in the days of Abelard and St. Bernard. How in the person of obscurest friars and Dominican inquisitors the ecclesiastical spirit turned for a time against the study of Hebrew and Greek, is written not only in the "*Augenspiegel*" of Reuchlin, and in the broad satire of the "*Epistolæ Obscurorum Virorum*," but in the early history of the revival of Greek and Hebrew studies in Germany and England. And how this opposition, in spite of its narrowness and acerbity, may have been often inspired by a sincere love for religion and morality, is written for candid inference in those disgraceful annals of the Renaissance which record the boundless egotism and the boundless profligacy of the later Humanists, who converted the Revival of Learning into a revival of paganism. The outcome of the new authority had resulted, as one of its modern apologists confesses, in a wholesale and undiscerning prejudice in favor of Greek and Roman antiquity, in the social and political success of the most unscrupulous talent, and in a general disbelief of all Christian doctrines, because of the discovered falseness of much that passed for orthodox church teaching and practice.

But Humanism interposed a counterpoise to church authority in the intellectual realm alone. Its social, moral, and religious effects were incidental. It remained for Luther to erect a counterpoise avowedly in the domain of religion and morals. The Humanists had turned their backs on the old religion in the name of books—the humane letters of Greece and Rome. Luther turned his back on the old religion in the name of a book—the Bible as by him expounded. And from the date of the Lutheran Reformation down to the present time, the doctrine of church authority in matters of faith and morals has suffered bifurcation and has steadily set in two different directions; as seen, on the one hand, in the affirmance of an infallible hierarchy divinely commissioned to be the judge of religious truth, and, on the other hand, in the affirmance of an infallible book, divinely appointed to be the test of all religious opinions, not excepting those of ecumenical councils; and this book open to private interpretation under the divine guidance promised to all true disciples. It is no wonder, therefore, that Catholic theology has finally elaborated the former theory into the dogma of papal infalli-

bility, and that Protestant theology is still elaborating a final theory of inspiration; for, in working on these separate lines, the defenders of each faith have been laboring for the clearest possible definition of the doctrine which is seen to be for each the doctrine of a standing or falling church. And truth has always been the gainer by clearness of definition, though authority has often been the loser by it. The mechanical theory of verbal inspiration gained clearness of definition in the days of Buxtorf and Owen, but the authority of that theory suffered when, on the strength of it, those eminent divines undertook to deny such a plain historical fact as the post-Christian origin of vowel points in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. The theory of an objective infallibility has gained clearness of definition by the decision of the Vatican Council, but whether the Catholic Church will gain in respect of its authority by the clearness with which it has defined the seat of infallibility, must depend on the use that shall be made of that infallibility for the superhuman enlightenment of the Christian world. So long as infallibility was supposed to require for its enunciation a vast ecumenical council gathered from the four corners of the earth, it was not easy to invoke that supreme arbitrament for the ascertainment of religious truth. But this difficulty vanishes in the presence of the Universal Pastor, charged with divine authority to settle *ex cathedra* any and all questions of faith and morals pertaining to the universal consciousness of the church. If the authority is not to be used at all, or if it is not to be used when it is most necessary, a cloud will rest on its title. For instance, in the matter of M. Renan's recent cavils about the book of Judith, declared by the Council of Trent to be an inspired book, it surprises us to learn from Cardinal Newman that "his charges can neither be proved nor refuted just now, while the strange discoveries are in progress about Assyrian and Persian history by means of the cuneiform inscriptions."* And it does not help us to be told, as he tells us, that "when the need comes the church or the Holy See will interpret the book for us," because the need is greatest "just now" when the darkness is thickest. When the question shall have been settled, in the one way or the other, by the process of discovery in the cuneiform inscriptions or otherwise, there will be no need for the intervention of the Holy See.

*"The Nineteenth Century," for February, 1884.

And with the reserves thus put on the dogma, making it in its exercise a function of time and human history, the objections to it are reduced to a minimum, because the doctrine itself is reduced to a minimum as respects the discovery and definition of theoretical religious truth, and finds its congenial sphere in the prescription of practical church order and discipline — matters in which every church has a final authority of some kind.

For the student of history the strife of tongues between Catholic and Protestant has lost much of its bitterness, as well it might when the Catholic of to-day, standing in the presence of modern society with the Syllabus of Pius IX. in his hands, is more protestant than the Protestants, and when the Protestant of to-day, standing in the presence of Universal Christendom, is more catholic than the Catholics. And surely the Catholic who would renounce his obligations to Protestantism must first forget the *deliquium* from which his church was rescued by the reactive force of the Lutheran Reformation with all its limitations, as the Protestant of to-day who would renounce his obligations to Catholicism must first forget the hole of the pit from which the moral order of Europe was dug. And if Christianity is weakened by the schism, it should now be tolerably clear to both Catholics and Protestants that the church will not regain its unity by authority, but will regain its authority by unity.

For in the meantime a new authority has arisen to challenge the standing of both Protestants and Catholics in the field of faith and morals — the authority of modern science which, in the person of many among its typical votaries, has assumed to bring all religion and the whole doctrine of morals within the domain of purely natural and evolutionary processes extending from moner to man. The profession of modern science has become in the devotion of its disciples a great cult, in the scope of its teachings a great propaganda, in the number of its adherents a great fellowship with its visible and invisible communion; with its patriarchs like Roger and Francis Bacon, with its saints like Newton and Kepler, with its great high priests like Comte, with its star-eyed expositors like Darwin, with its apostles like Tyndall, with its warrior bishops like Huxley, with its fiery crusaders like Haeckel, with its systematic doctors like Herbert Spencer, and (proof above all of its authority) with its untensured monks like Fielding Meek in the solitude of his cloister telling off fossil shells

for the beads of his rosary. Science sits to-day in the highest seat of secular authority, and in passing sentence of excision on unscientific opinion, the only heresy it knows, it makes the little finger of its authority thicker than the loins of theology. Clothed with this secular authority in the eyes of the people, it has, of course, the defect as well as the virtue, the weakness as well as the strength of its high prerogative. Its strength is seen in the conquest it has made over nature and thought in a thousand directions. Its weakness is seen in that invariable concomitant of all high authority, a disposition to set up its flag over more territory than it holds, and to supplement *de facto* achievement with the *de jure* pretension of unproved hypothesis. And so it comes to pass that much pseudo-science is easily floated to-day on the strength of the authority of science in general, as in "the ages of faith" much pseudo-religion was carried along by the current of the popular credulity, and as in the days of the early Renaissance much pseudo-learning came to the foaming surface only to sink like lead in the waters of oblivion. Cosmogony is just now the reigning foible among those who have small knowledge and less science.

It appears from this review that the volume of authority in the world has been constantly increasing in mass while constantly changing its form, and that in this increase of mass and change of form there has been a gradual but steady differentiation in favor of truth as well as lucidity. For this purification of method in every department of thought the world is mainly indebted to modern physical science, and no department has gained more by the clarifying process than the domain of theology. It is not that physical science is averse to authority, for more than almost any other study it lays its very foundations in authority — but in proved and verified authority. Tolerant of conduct, physical science is utterly intolerant of all opinion which impinges on its proved and verified authority. "There is no liberty of conscience," exclaims Comte, "in astronomy, in physics, in chemistry, even in physiology, in the sense that every one would think it absurd not to accept in confidence the principles established in those sciences by the competent persons. If it is otherwise in politics, the reason is merely because, the old doctrines having gone by and the new ones not being yet formed, there are not properly during the interval any established opinions."

Opinions establish themselves slowly in physical science. They establish themselves still more slowly in theology, because the problems with which it deals are not only more obscure but more complex, involving the will as well as the intelligence of men. If, as has been said, "Religion and Science set up in opposition to each other at the Revival of Letters," it is only what Religion and Philosophy did in the days of the early church fathers, yet religion ended, as everybody knows, by making Aristotelianism the very organon of theological definition from Anselm to Luther. If the Humanists put Cicero before St. Paul, and Seneca before St. John, the language of Cicero and Seneca has become to-day the very propædæutic of theology. If the Hoogstratens and Pfefferkorns of theological obscurantism set their faces like flint against the new learning at the beginning of the sixteenth century, they did but pave the way for Luther. If to know Greek in the days of Erasmus was, as he tells us, to be suspected of heresy—"hæresis est polite loqui, hæresis Græce scire"—it is to others than tonsured monks that we must look to-day for the disparagement of that "college fetich." So great have been the shiftings of authority that it is in the name of physical science and not of theology that the classical culture is put on the defensive in this modern age.

There are those who predict that Theology and Science are gathering their forces for some hard-fought Armageddon in the near or distant future. It is not on any plain of Esdraelon that the conflicts of free inquiry are to be settled, but on the broad fields of universal history. It is not by the shock of battle, but by the slow percolation of ideas through the strata of sects and parties and schools in the tract of the ages that the authority of opinions is finally made commensurate with their proved and demonstrated truth. It is in this way, says Cardinal Newman in his classical book on the "Development of Christian Doctrine," that all the great fundamental questions of theology were settled at the commencement of the Christian religion—questions as to "the canon of Scripture, and its inspiration; that is, whether Christianity depends on a written document as Judaism; if so, on what writings or how many; whether that document is self-interpreting or requires a comment, and whether any authoritative comment or commentator is provided; whether the revelation and the document are commensurate, or the one

outruns the other." All these questions, he adds, "find no solution on the surface of Scripture, nor indeed under the surface in the case of most men, however long and diligent might be their study of it. Nor were these difficulties settled by authority, as far as we know, at the commencement of the religion; yet surely it is quite conceivable that an Apostle might have dissipated them all in a few words, had Divine Wisdom thought fit. But in matter of fact the decision has been left to time, to the slow process of thought, to the influence of mind upon mind, the issues of controversy and the growth of opinion." If this process was divinely wise for the early age of the church it is probably divinely wise for the church in all ages.

Authority in science changes, but science remains. Authority in theology changes, but theology remains. Science changes, but nature remains. Theology changes, but the fundamental truths of Christianity remain forever the same. And thus it is that, in and under this constant evolution, all history bears its testimony to the saying recorded by Bacon: "Truth is the daughter of Time, not of Authority."

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